

to hear it. I thought he was a clothes model."

"Oh—how horrid of you! I wish you were half the clothes model he is; then I wouldn't be ashamed to be seen on the street with you."

"Hold on there, kid—that's two times you've pulled that stuff about bein' ashamed to be seen with me. I ain't the guy to force myself on a girl what don't want me—see?"

"You will misunderstand. You make me mad! But I am honest with you. I am ashamed—and I'd rather you knew it. I'd rather you'd be a clerk at ten dollars a week than a fighter."

"You would, eh? Why?"

"Because your profession is coarse. It makes a brute of you."

"I'm a brute, eh?"

"Not yet. But some day— But that isn't the thing at all. A prize-fighter ain't got no standin' in the community. People look down on him—"

His right hand closed about her rounded arm in a vise-like grip.

"I reckon you'd better cut out that line of gab," he snapped. "I'm tired of it—even from you. I'm tellin' you this, Nellie: I'm a fighter, and I'm gonna stay one—see? I fight my fights straight and clean. I live clean—not like your cigarette-smoking, cologne-using young Hawkins. Why, I'd take that guy like this"—he extended one perfectly muscled arm—"and fair break him in half with a twist—so."

"And he eats mashed potatoes with a fork—not a knife," she retorted with equal heat.

"Goin' some. But I'm puttin' this to you straight. I been goin' with you because I like you. Get that? I want to marry you. But I wouldn't marry you nor any other girl that didn't want me. I ain't that kind. I wouldn't have you—feelin' like you do. But I'm tellin' you this much." His eyes shone with a steely glint. "I'm a fighter, and I'm gonna remain a fighter—until I get licked outa the ring. I wouldn't quit it for you n'r any one else. It's clean and it's honest. I'm taking you home now, and I'm leavin' you there. When you want me, you can send for me. I'll forgive you f'r what you've pulled to-night—though it ain't easy. I'll come back when you want me. If you wanna marry Cissy Hawkins—go to it. But I won't let any woman twist me around her thumb!"

They walked back to her house in silence. Then he left her. He strode down the streets unseeing—his thoughts chaotic.

"I wisht I was a woman," he said to himself suddenly. "I'd like like hell to cry for about ten minutes."

As for Nellie, she blinked her eyes rapidly as she undressed, and tried to make herself believe that he'd come back to her in a day or so. And it wasn't until the lights were out and she was curled up in her bed that she gave way to the tears that had been fighting to come ever since he'd said good-by at the door.

And finally she slept—and dreamed a nightmare wherein Kid Kelley was holding Percy Hawkins in his hands, squashing him into a pulp—and laughing.

**E**VEN though Nellie knew that the Kid would not come back to her, she hoped against hope that he would. It would then be so easy to capitulate—and maybe she'd have more power over him than ever. But come he did not; and her face grew pale and her attitude dejected—and the girls at the store commented.

Said Yvette to Maybelle, between customers:

"Seems like that prize-fighter has given Nellie the G. B. Poor kid! Well, maybe it's better, after all, because now she'll marry Mr. Hawkins, who is as much of a jumpman as there is in the world."

Mr. Percy Hawkins, whose passion for Nellie Dugan had been spurred rather than lessened by the rivalry of the rising young light-weight prize-fighter, noticed the change in the girl, and discovered eventually that she had four evenings per week which she could spare for Mr. Hawkins, provided Mr. Hawkins cared to have them. Mr. Hawkins did. He

was with her constantly. The four evenings became five—then six. One night he essayed to hold her hand, and she shuddered and drew it away. He put it down to coquetry, and perhaps liked her the better for it.

Mr. Hawkins prided himself on his conversational powers. He usually called for Nellie about eight o'clock. From eight until nine he discussed the war situation, Wall Street, the newest "best seller," his high school days and the knowledge he had absorbed at that time, the absolute necessity of social position, his friends among the e-light, culture, his prospects at the store. From nine until ten-thirty his talk was of dancing and vaudeville and moving pictures. And from ten-thirty until eleven he discussed them—Nellie and himself, or himself and Nellie—in a most personal vein.

At first she reveled in the eight-to-nine conversation. It was, as he explained, so uplifting and educational. He was, as Yvette expressed it, "a puffectly grand talker. You can't follow more'n half what he says—and that's proof."

But gradually she came to the point where she counted the minutes until the conversation turned on the topics of dance and movies, where she was more at home. The ten-thirty to eleven

*"Fight, Tommy, fight!" breathed the girl. There was a lightning exchange of fists; for perhaps ten seconds the men stood body to body."*

talk she liked less and less as time passed. And one night she broke an engagement with him to sit in her room and read—the sporting pages of every evening daily! And each and every one of the sporting sheets contained some mention, ranging from a paragraph to a column, about Kid Kelley, the phenomenal young lightweight who was to fight Knockout Riley within the next fortnight. Three of the papers had pictures of his handsome, smiling face, and of the contrastingly unpleasing physiognomy of Mr. Knockout Riley. The girl shuddered. What if the Kid should be beaten?

One account in particular interested her:

Unless Kid Kelley takes a brace during the next few days, his chances against Knockout Riley will be slight. Riley is the best man he has ever stacked up against, and he needs to be in the best of trim; but during the past few weeks his training has been off. He has lost the ginger which has characterized his work in the past. In proper trim the Kid will stand better than an even chance, but at present he needs a decided brace. Outside worries are probably affecting him, unless it is that the idea of meeting a man of Riley's caliber has, to use the vernacular, got his goat.

In her heart the girl understood what it all meant. Kid Kelley was worrying about her. She had failed him at a crisis. She began to realize that for a long time she had been contrasting the masculine qualities of the fighter with the rather effeminate qualities of the floor-walker, and that the Kid had by no means suffered by comparison.

Impulsively she secured pen, ink, and paper. She hurriedly wrote a letter and addressed it to Kid Kelley.

The note was short, but to the point. She said that she wanted to see him; she asked him to call the next night at eight o'clock. Then she donned her coat and hat and sallied forth to a letter-box. But at the letter-box she halted. What would he think? Wasn't it unmanly?

As impulsively as she had written, she

tore the note into tiny pieces and flung them into the gutter. Then she went to her room and sought solace in tears.

"I can't do it," she sobbed. "I can't—can't! He can do without me—and he'll think less of me if I do. O-o-h! I'm so unhappy!"

**T**HE arena was filled with cigar smoke, which eddied over the ring in a dense, rancid cloud. Knockout Riley lay back on his chair, breathing easily as he took the rough but kindly ministrations of his seconds. He was grinning confidently. Eight rounds of the battle had been fought. The ninth was half a minute away.

In the opposite corner sprawled Kid Kelley. His face was swollen almost be-

ond and stared straight into the shining eyes of Nellie Dugan. She had come to him—had come when he needed her most.

Knockout Riley sidled close, ready for the finishing touches. The spectators stared, and held their breath. Even before a blow was struck, they could see a change in the apparently defeated fighter.

Nellie had come! She was there—watching! Kid Kelley knew what it meant, and he knew that he must win. He felt suddenly that he could!

He doubled into a venomous, sinewy ball, waiting Riley's rush. And, as the vicious figure catapulted toward him, he leaped forward to meet the attack. The



yond recognition. His very attitude was one of dejection. Red Chandler, his chief second, talked fiercely into the fighter's ear.

"Y'r whippin' y'rself," he seethed. "An' y'r a better man 'n what Riley is. You ain't got no life in you. What's th' matter, anyway?"

"It don't make no special difference," snapped Kid Kelley, "whether I win or lose."

"Th' dickens it don't!"

There was a stir at the door. The ticket-taker stared in anger and curiosity. Though women were allowed in the club, the presence of one was rare. The woman at the door whirled around and railed at the scented dandy who accompanied her.

"Stay out, then!" she said sharply. "You ain't got no business in here, anyway. Only men are wanted in here!"

Her eyes took in the ring, but she didn't pause to marvel at its barbaric strangeness. In the nearest corner she saw the semi-nude figure of Kid Kelley, crimsoned, seemingly unconscious. The only sign of life was the regular rise and fall of his massive chest as the seconds snapped towels before him and rubbed his shaking knees with liniment.

The spectators craned their necks curiously. Red Chandler's teeth were bared in a sneer.

"Wimmin," he remarked—"always buttin' in. They're payin' more attention to her than they are to th' fight. If she ain't headed this way, too!"

**T**HE gong clanged sharply. Kid Kelley staggered to his feet. He was listless, almost indifferent to the defeat that faced him in the person of Knockout Riley.

And then, clear and sweet to his ears above the stir in the audience, came a familiar feminine voice:

"Fight, Tommy, fight! I've come to help you!"

The listlessness dropped from him. He turned and for a fleeting fraction of a sec-

bodies crashed together. There was a lightning exchange of fists. For perhaps ten seconds the men stood body to body, ripping, tearing, slamming home rights and lefts—each one crushing.

Knockout Riley, marveling at the metamorphosis in the man before him, reluctantly broke ground, then set himself again. But it was not for long. Kid Kelley was all over him, slamming home punches viciously, cleanly, furiously. Riley broke ground again. The audience, realizing that it was witnessing a phenomenon, leaped to its feet and howled demoniacally. Men hugged each other in sheer hysteria. In Kelley's corner the woman stood, biting her lips in mingled fear and wonder.

"Tommy!" she breathed. "Fight, Tommy—fight!"

**H**ER voice could not have reached him above the din, but he seemed to know. He shook off the embracing arms of Knockout Riley and leaped back once again. Riley sought safety in a clinch. The reversal was cataclysmic. But Kelley met him coming in.

The Kid's right, crooked at the elbow, and with a hundred and thirty-two pounds of muscle behind it, crashed sickeningly to the solar plexus. His left flashed to the side of the jaw. Knockout Riley, erstwhile victor, crumpled to the mat. The counting of ten was a mere formality.

In Kelley's corner, the girl had broken down and was sobbing.

He joined her in a taxi outside the club's entrance. She was shaken and nervous. His strong arms closed about her slender form, and she buried her head in his shoulder.

"Oh, Tommy!" she murmured. "I've come back to you—and I was—almost too late."

He stroked her hand and kissed her gently.

"I knew you'd come back," he said softly—"if you cared—at all."